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ABSTRACT

Model United Nations (MUN) conferences are held throughout the United States each year to help college students learn about major international issues and the problems and possibilities for international cooperation. There are many educational aspects of the MUN program in which students play the role of a representative of a particular country to a specific U.N. body. In their preparation for a model U.N. conference, students must do a great deal of background reading to gain a thorough knowledge of the U.N. in general and of the particular organ on which they will serve. The delegate's effectiveness also depends heavily on an intimate understanding of the country represented, its political and economic systems, its level of development, its foreign policy, and its relations with other countries. Students also gain an insight into international negotiation, consensus building, and bloc politics. Finally, delegates must be familiar with and develop some facility in using parliamentary rules. Although most delegations receive some funding from their college or university, funding also comes from student government funds, from a Dean, a department, or special budget. Most delegations engage in some kind of fund-raising activities during the year. (Author/RM)

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TEACHING INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION THROUGH MODEL U.N.'S

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Model United Nations activities can be very effective in stimulating interest in international affairs in general and international organizations, in particular. They offer students an opportunity to learn by doing, so to speak, by playing the role of a representative of a particular country to a specific U.N. body. The preparation that is required provides a unique way of teaching about the United Nations, major international issues, and the problems and possibilities for international cooperation. Students gain a distinct "feel" for their country through the demands of role playing, something that no standard course can teach. There are added benefits in closer student-faculty ties if a faculty adviser is actively involved, potential impact on enrollment in international affairs courses, and the social aspects of meeting students from other colleges and universities.

Model United Nations Conferences: Who, What and Where

Model U.N. conferences (MUN's) are held throughout the United States each year, ranging in size from 50 to 1500 delegates. They vary considerably in the extent of the simulation attempted. Some are limited to the Security Council and/or General Assembly; others simulate a wide variety of U.N. bodies, including specialized agencies. They also vary considerably in how and by whom they are run. The purposes of Model United Nations conferences can be summarized as follows:

a) to acquaint students with the scope and depth of the problems facing mankind;

b) to develop understanding of the structure, the strengths, and weaknesses of the UN; the scope and depth of the issues facing that organization;

c) to familiarize participants with the assigned country, its culture, people, economic, geographical, historical and political realities, goals and interests, and to develop skills in analyzing and interpreting national positions on various issues:

d) to understand better the dynamics of the international system and the role of the United Nations in contributing to global cooperation, peace and order in the context of international conflict and the growing problems of interdependence;

e) to provide a practical experience in multilateral diplomacy and to develop the written, verbal, interpersonal and organizational skills necessary to the diplomatic process.

A list of conferences held each year is available from UNA/USA. The major ones include the National Model United Nations (NMUN) held in New York in April, the Midwest Model United Nations (MMUN) held in St. Louis in early March, the Far West Model United Nations held on a participating campus in late April, the University of Pennsylvania Model United Nations (UPMUNC) held in November in Philadelphia, and the Harvard Model United Nations, held in Boston in late February or early March. Most of my experience has been with the National Model UN and therefore, I shall use that conference as the basis for many of my comments.

The basic idea of a model U.N. is to simulate the work of a particular U.N. body, with delegates from different colleges and universities representing member states, an established agenda, and rules of procedure. The NMUN attempts to adhere relatively closely to the U.N. procedure, including the election of chairpersons, vice chairmen and rapporteurs for each body. At many other conferences, those offices are filled by members of the secretariat.

As was indicated earlier, the structure of the conferences varies. The NMUN in recent years has experimented with a variety of bodies in addition to the usual simulations of the Security Council and some of the main committees of the General Assembly. That structure has included ECOSOC and the Commissions on Transnational Corporations, Narcotic Drugs, Human Settlements, Human Rights, Social Development, and the Governing Council of UNDP. It has also simulated some of the smaller committees of the General Assembly: the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Committee on the Structure of the U.N., the Special Committee of 24, and the Special Committee against Apartheid. Several conferences and special sessions have also been included: the Conference on the Law of the Sea (broken into two committees and a working group); the Special Session of the General Assembly on Disarmament; UNCTAD (several negotiating groups and Trade and Development Board Committees); the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament; the Special Session on the New International Economic Order; and the Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy (five working groups). An even more unique aspect of the NMUN are the recent simulations of the Board of Governors of the IMF, the Council of the FAO, the ILO, the North Atlantic Council, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the OECD. Not all of these have been simulated in any one year as the structure is determined by the interest of the Secretary-General and the conference staff.

The variety of bodies simulated gives a clue also to the broad scope of the agendas of MUN conferences and the varied nature of the simulations themselves. The agendas normally include current or upcoming topics and range from the amorphous, e.g. the Middle East, to the minute, e.g. approving a development project for Trinidad and Tobago. The actual simulations may be the discussions by a small working group of a rather narrow problem or the more formal "debate" of a large General Assembly committee. The end result may be a report, a convention, a series of resolutions, or conceivably "nothing."

Delegates often come to MUN conferences with the goal of passing "their" resolutions and little attention may be given to bargaining, negotiation, consensus building, or bloc politics. In recent years, however, more emphasis has been placed on the latter at many of the conferences with a consequent de-emphasis of resolutions. The result is that students are more likely to experience the frustrations of international cooperation and interaction, and consequently, have a more realistic perspective on international organizations. At the NMUN, a rather elaborate effort to simulate bloc politics is woven into the structure of the conference.

Educational Aspects of MUN

It may be restating the obvious to talk about the educational aspects of MUN. They fall into six major categories: international relations in general, the U.N. and its various organs (or other IGO's as appropriate), issues, the particular country represented, negotiation, bloc politics and procedure.

Most students who are attracted to MUN activities will already have some interest in and knowledge of international politics. However, MUN usually serves to deepen both through the process of researching issues, specific countries, and interacting with delegates representing other countries.

It is in regard to the international organizations, though, that the greatest learning takes place because most students have limited knowledge about international organizations. Even a course in international organizations will generally give them only the barest textbook understanding and knowledge. In their preparation for a model U.N. conference, however, students must really work to gain a thorough knowledge of the U.N. in general, and of the particular organ on which they will serve. In the case of some of the more esoteric bodies, unless a student has access to a U.N. depository library, this may take some extensive digging or require the acquisition of additional source materials. To assist delegate preparation, the NMUN, for example, provides background papers which describe the nature of the body and its work, the issues on the agenda, and how the simulation

will be run. In some cases, important documents will also be included.

The delegate's effectiveness also depends heavily on an intimate understanding of the country represented, its political and economic systems, its level of development, its foreign policy and its relations with other countries. Much research is devoted to discovering how the country voted on certain resolutions, what views it has expressed and what type of role it plays. An acute dilemma arises for delegates representing smaller countries that typically might be quiescent in many debates, even absent. There is a fine line between accurate representation and reasonable creativity. My own students got very bored in representing France at the 1979 NMUN conference because they found themselves abstaining on most issues and not taking an active role due to their devotion to accurate representation. It can be a lot more fun to play a radical country! The curious thing about MUN conferences is that the United States is frequently very poorly represented. Conceivably it is more difficult to represent one's own country. On the other hand, problems have frequently arisen with foreign students doing just that and becoming emotionally involved in the simulation. Many delegations to the NMUN benefit in their preparation from briefings by their respective missions in New York. These briefings provide a last minute opportunity to ask questions of an official representative of the country, to gain a better "feel" for their country's policies and views, as well as the satisfaction of meeting an official representative.

Perhaps one of the most unique educational aspects of MUN conferences is the insight into international negotiation, consensus building and bloc politics. To the degree that these are stressed, a student will learn about the obstacles to international cooperation as well as the opportunities. Delegates should learn a great deal about power and influence. Within the regional and special interest groups, they will experience the significance of both substantive differences and political rivalries. Two years ago, for example, a delegate representing Zambia was elected to head the African group; he learned the limitations of leadership and power, however, as the delegate representing Angola persistently challenged him. Just the exposure to the variety of groupings can be instructive.

Finally, it should be noted that a student has to learn something about parliamentary procedure. While not all bodies may operate according to formal parliamentary rules, it is important that all delegates be familiar with them and develop some facility in using them. Confusion often arises, though, as to the nature of "debate" and procedure, for the U.N. is not a debating forum in a strict sense. Representatives engage in more formal posturing, through statements of view,

with the actual debate taking place off-stage. MUN delegates often have backgrounds in speech and debate and therefore have to accustom themselves to the difference. Similarly, the UN's practice of discussing an agenda item, including all relevant resolutions and amendments submitted, with a succession of votes at the conclusion may be difficult to grasp at first. In reality, many students prefer and benefit most from the smaller, more informal committees and working groups. They find the relative absence of showmanship and posturing a relief and the opportunity to discuss an issue more satisfying.

Delegate Preparation

Preparation is the key to the success and benefit of MUN's. It must encompass the U.N., the agenda topics, the country to be represented, blocs and groups, and rules of procedure. The student must assimilate all of this and be able to apply it.

Format of Preparation: This will depend in large part on how a MUN group is organized. Many groups are formal clubs. Others are selected through a process of application. Some are organized around a specific course.

a) Familiarity with the U.N.: This is often handled via prerequisites for participation, or by incorporating MUN into a course on international organization. Some delegations use informal sessions early in the year to provide the necessary background. Background papers, where provided, will give more specific information on each organ to be simulated.

b) Background on the country: This can be handled in a number of ways -- lecture, division of labor and presentations to the group, or individual research and reading. Most delegates will not acquire much familiarity with the country until they get into the specific agenda items.

c) The agenda: Background papers provided by the secretariat of a conference are a starting point. In addition, there are a variety of sources a student can consult. If MUN is an ongoing activity and library resources are limited, it can be very useful to acquire some of the materials available from the U.N. on major topics such as disarmament, human rights and the NIEO. (See bibliographies in Margaret P. Karns and Jeffrey P. Krans, Preparation Guide for the National Model U.N. (1979). Also helpful are the Model U.N. Survival Kits available from UNA/USA.)

d) Position papers and resolutions: Two important parts of preparation are the writing of position papers and sample resolutions. Position papers summarize the basic issues pertaining to the agenda topics and elaborate on the country's

positions, voting record and interests. They may be presented orally to the whole delegation and/or duplicated and distributed. It is important for all members of a delegation to have a "feel" for their country's stance in all bodies, and for those working on related topics to coordinate their efforts and follow consistent positions. It is also important to have all delegates practice writing resolutions. It can also be instructive to write a resolution for the geographic or common interest group to which that country belongs. This familiarizes the student with the unique format of resolutions and the types of language used. It also tests their understanding of both their country's views and those of other countries with which they share common interests.

e) Simulations: Simulations can be a very useful part of preparation in giving delegates a feel for the MUN situation, and a chance to get their feet wet ahead of the conference. It also gives delegates an opportunity to acquaint themselves with other countries' positions on a given issue, and more importantly, it offers a means to learn how to use parliamentary rules of procedure (See Preparation Guide, pp. 8-9 for further details).

f) Role of a Faculty Adviser: It should be evident from the foregoing that a faculty adviser can play a major role in MUN preparation. The nature of that role may vary, however, depending on whether MUN is incorporated into a course or on how direct a role the faculty member chooses to play. In my own experience, direct involvement of a faculty member makes a significant difference in the quality of the preparation and participation of a delegation. After a group has built up some expertise, however, returning members can carry some of the responsibilities for preparation. At a conference, a faculty adviser can serve as a vital resource person, although he or she must be careful not to dictate delegates' actions. Advisors are prohibited from the floor of the conference and from participating in the meetings.

g) Head Delegate: It will be necessary to designate a Head Delegate for the conference itself, if not before. This person functions as coordinator and chief spokesperson, and attends business meetings during the conference. At the NMUN, Head Delegates elect student members of the Board of Directors. With large delegations, some groups have successfully tried a "roving" head delegate - one not assigned to any committee, but generally available for advice and to clear major policy decisions and votes.

No one format or strategy will work for all delegations. Each group and faculty adviser will have to experiment to determine the most satisfactory method.

Funding

This is the real nitty-gritty of any Model UN program. Most delegations receive some funding from their college or university, but the amounts vary widely. Funding may come from student government funds, from a Dean, departmental or special budget; most delegations engage in some kind of fund-raising activities during the year. Some delegations come with all expenses paid; in other cases, delegations pay for all but a small portion of their costs. The variation is almost infinite, but the problem of money is perennial.

Conclusion

In conclusion, MUN activities expose students to the workings of IGO's, and to the broad range of issues dealt with by those bodies. Students gain an intimate knowledge of the countries they represent, and of other countries with which they must interact. Through efforts to simulate bloc politics, diplomatic interactions and bargaining, students gain a deeper understanding of the possibilities for and obstacles to international cooperation. Some model UN groups operate with minimal or no faculty involvement. However, my experience with the National Model United Nations has shown that the best delegations usually have had the benefit of an active faculty adviser. Certainly such involvement means closer student-faculty relations which can be attractive to students. An active model UN program will also have a spill-over effect to courses in international affairs whether or not model UN participation is connected to a particular course. Many schools do offer academic credit for the work either through a regular course or through independent study. There are distinct social benefits as well. Model UN conferences are fun!

In short, the benefits of model UN are many. It is most importantly an educational tool, offering the student a unique opportunity for role playing and for learning. The result is almost invariably a deeper knowledge of and interest in both international organizations and international affairs than can be achieved through the normal classroom experience.